

MINUTES

**Third Quarterly Meeting of the
MISSOURI VETERANS COMMISSION
Held, pursuant to notice
Tuesday, August 26, 2003 — 10:00 AM
St. Robert City Hall, St. Roberts, MO**

I. CALL TO ORDER

- A. Invocation & Pledge of Allegiance
- B. Roll Call
In attendance: **Chairman, Carl Niewoehner, Vice Chairman Donald Gralike, Member Bernadette Miller, Member Emmett Fairfax, and Member Carson Ross.**
- C. Introductions
Guests and staff present.
 - 1. Guests: **Col. Wayne Medley**, MO Military Funeral Honors Program; **Jack Matthews**, Pres. MO Veterans Commission Foundation; **Linda Duffen**, VA Medical Center Columbia; **Chief Raphael Wahwassuck**, State Commander DAV; **Leonard Higgins**, Commander Post 321 American Legion, St. Roberts, MO; **Michael Lay**, Central District Director Missouri State Council Vietnam Veterans of America; **Jimmy Tucker and Dick Pennington**, Voices of Retired Military ; **Mark Forshe**, VVA Post 4238 Dixon;
 - 2. Staff: **Ronald Taylor**, Executive Director; **Jill Talken**, Executive Secretary; **Ralph Durnbaugh**, Director of Planning and Special Projects; **Sharon Keith**, Director, Service to Veterans Program; **Hal Dulle**, Assistant Director; **Jess Rasmussen**, Lead Director Higginsville Cemetery; **Anne Payne**, Superintendent of Homes; **Tim Norton**, Director of Properties
- D. Approval of May 2, 2003 Commission Meeting Minutes. Commissioner Ross made a motion to accept the May meeting minutes and Commissioner Fairfax seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
- E. Col. Wayne Medley informed the Commission since the July 1999 to date the Honors Program has coordinated and provided 27,541 services to Missouri's veterans. Perform an average of 650 services per month. Ten Honors Teams are located throughout the state: Joplin, Springfield, Kansas City, Moberly, two teams in St. Louis, Salem, Cape Girardeau and Poplar Bluff. Possible local office in the Hannibal area is being looked at.

DOD approved the utilization of the ceremonial bugle. Survey indicated that 95% + families were satisfied with the ceremonial bugle.

Jack Matthews, President MVC Foundation, Inc., and past Commissioner reported that the Foundation is sponsoring its second annual golf tournament in Fulton, Missouri on Friday, September 12th. Team applications and raffle tickets are available.

Carl Niewoehner, Chairman informed the attendees of the meeting that the Commission has received letters from supporters of a State Veterans Cemetery in the Ft. Leonard Wood site: Diana Stanford, Kenneth Forrest, C.A. Anderson, American Legion Post 298, Dixon, Missouri, and Michael Lay all in strong support of the Veterans Cemetery. Mr. Niewoehner read one letter aloud received from Phelps County Commission Office.

Representative Bill Ransdall thanked the Commission for traveling to Ft. Leonard Wood to conduct their quarterly commission meeting. He also expressed his appreciation to the Commission for touring the facility. Representative Ransdall noted that Debbie Atkins provided refreshments for the Commission today and is a supporter of Veterans. Representative Ransdall addressed the commission asking for their approval today to support the proposed cemetery site located at Ft. Leonard Wood. A piece of land has been identified 160 acres next to H Highway and the Jack Wagner Gate. Representative from groups in support of the cemetery are here today and would ask for the Commission's approval for these individuals to give testimony. Chairman Niewoehner granted approval.

1. Kenneth Miller, Laclede Electric Cooperative
2. John Greenlee, Gasconage Electric Cooperative
3. Don Kinsley, City Administrator for City of Waynesville on behalf of the Mayor Cliff Hammock in support of the veterans cemetery
4. James Morgan, Mayor City of Crocker
5. Tony Crismon, Presiding Commissioner County Commission Pulaski County
6. Norman Herron, City Administrator, City of St. Roberts
7. John Butts, City Administrator Rolla, no letter but would like to go on record of supporting the Veterans Cemetery.
8. Michael Lay, Central District Director Missouri State Council Vietnam Veterans of America
9. Randy Becht, Broker/Owner Becht Properties, Inc.
10. Dick Pennington, Coordinator, Voices of Retired Military, 1,500 + members of veterans and spouse and families support cemetery.
11. Rene Cohen Executive Director Waynesville/St. Roberts Chamber of Commerce brought 20 letters in support of cemetery
12. Randy Walters, Funeral Director and Cemetery Owner

13. Keith Pritchard, President Security Bank of Pulaski County
14. Jack Wagner, Former Fort Leonard Wood Commander 1975-1976
15. Chief Raphael Wahwassuck, State Commander DAV thanked the Commission and Representative Ransdall for all their dedication and support of veterans.

Linda Duffen, VA Medical Center Columbia, employed with the VA for 31 years.

Pete McBrady, Associate Director of St. Louis VA Medical Center introduced himself to the Commission. He is attending on behalf of Linda Kurtz who is attending the American Legion Conference in St. Louis with Secretary Pincipi.

Chairman Niewoehner informed the attendees that the Missouri Veterans Commission along with the VA opened six clinics at the State Veterans Homes one year ago. These clinics were constructed with state funds costing roughly 1 million dollars apiece and are furnished and staffed by VA personnel. All the CBOC's are operating at full capacity. Almost half of the patients being seen at the clinics are new veterans. The other half is from patients transferred from VA hospitals which helped to lower the waiting time for appointments to six months rather than 12 to 14 months.

Ron Taylor explained one and half years ago the Missouri Legislature appropriated 150 thousand dollars to conduct Cemetery Feasibility Study in order to determine the need for an additional cemetery in the St. Louis, Kansas City or Fort Leonard Wood area. Based upon present federal cemetery anticipation it was determined that we do not need additional cemetery in St. Louis or Kansas City in the foreseeable future. Those studies conducted by the State and The Federal VA indicate that one would be justified in the Ft. Leonard Wood area would meet federal standards. A press release was sent out in May searching for land in the area. On Monday the Commission had the opportunity to look at the potential site at Fort Leonard Wood. The land does have potential to be a very satisfactory site. Mr. Taylor indicated Commission approval would be required to proceed with the cemetery plans and the testing of the soil. Commissioner Gralike made a motion to proceed with the planning and testing of the site. Commissioner Fairfax seconded the motion. By a voice vote the motion passed unanimously. Chairman Niewoehner encourage everyone to visit one the existing state cemeteries at Springfield, Higginsville, Jacksonville or Bloomfield. Representative Ransdall thanked the Commissioners for their unanimous support in passing to proceed with the Ft. Leonard Wood Cemetery proposal.

II. OLD BUSINESS:

Management Report: Executive Director Comments: Ronald Taylor

Budget: Mr. Taylor reported that due to the state budget cuts the present year Missouri Veterans Commission lost only \$89,000 out of a budget of over 50 million dollars and in addition the withholding was an additional 3% and we should be able to accommodate that with no affect on operations.

A copy of the Commission's current fund status was distributed to the members
*Note the Veterans Commission Capitol Improvement Trust Fund is reduced to 31 million dollars, down from over 80 million a few years ago. MVC's last projection indicated we thought we would be okay till 2008, recent figures indicate the fund will be depleted in 2007. Legislation changes this past session will help that fund.

Hal Dulle, Assistant Director reported that HB 444 co-sponsored by Representative Ransdall passed allowing the Missouri Veterans Commission to receive an additional 3 million dollars in the VCCITF. The VCCITF in part funds the Homes and Cemetery Programs. Prior to 1999 MVC received 30 million dollars per year from gaming admissions, since 1999 the Commission yielded most of the money allowing Early Childhood Development a portion.

SB 219, Senator Steelman's bill creates the Korean Conflict Medallion Program and makes changes to the WWII Program. Eligibility for the WWII medal extends to the eldest surviving child. Medals for the Korean Conflict will be available January 1, 2004. Mr. Taylor noted the Missouri Veterans Commission is soliciting for the design of the medal. Information has been sent out to DESE and service organizations and a press release was done in July. The deadline for accepting designs is October 1, 2003. The Commissioners will review and approve the design at the November meeting. Mr. Taylor gave a brief description of the front of the medal design and is asking for designs for the back of the medal. He is encouraging schools to work on as class projects. Commissioner Ross commented that some veterans do not know of the WWII special license plates or the WWII medal that is also available to veterans.

Mr. Taylor informed the Commissioners that agreements had been reached and signed with AFSCME and SEIU. Final Resolutions were distributed to each Commissioner.

Mr. Taylor reported that the Commission has been participating in the CARES hearings throughout the state. Dr. Almenoff, Acting Director for the VA Heartland Network did a presentation at the Poplar Bluff hearing and the CARES Commission expressed the opinion that this one of the best plans from any of the VISNs. They were strongly supportive of what they thought was one of the best community out based clinic Programs that they had dealt with. Mr. Taylor believes on the whole there was a very positive response from the CARES

Commission at to what is being done in this area although they realize it is going to take more funds to do all the things.

The CARES Commission itself is an independent Commission will make a recommendation to the President and then it will go for legislative approval. It will either be voted up or down and is not something that is going to be changed. He also noted Tim Norton has been participating on the Advisory Committee with the American Legion at the National level and reported that Senator Bond has indicated he would support funding needed for the recommendations of CARES project.

Missouri Veterans Homes: Anne Payne, Superintendent of Homes

Homes Program: Ms. Payne reported as of August 1, 2003, Missouri Veterans Homes are caring for more veterans than ever before.

The capacity of all seven Veterans Homes combined is 1,150. The Commissions five fully funded Veterans Homes (Cape Girardeau, Mexico, Mt. Vernon, St. James and St. Louis) averaged 95% occupancy for FY 2003.

Two newest homes (Cameron and Warrensburg) increased census by 136% during FY2003 ending the fiscal year with 85% occupancy. Both will be at 90 – 95% capacity by the end of this calendar year.

Statewide volunteers gave 117,102 hours of their time volunteering and statewide citizens gave \$552,153.00 in cash donations to our Veterans Homes.

Mr. Payne also explained the Homes Program Quality Management Outcomes (attachment).

Construction Update: Tim Norton, Director of Properties

Construction: Mr. Norton reported on the following current projects:

Bloomfield Cemetery Dedication date is set for Sunday, October 12, 2003;

Jacksonville Cemetery Dedication date is set for Saturday, October 25, 2003;

Mt. Vernon new 200 bed facility will begin installing furniture December 1 and the dedication will probably be held in mid December.

St. Louis new 100 bed addition project should be completed by October 20, 2003.

New addition will reduce the waiting list which is currently over 300. Other construction projects listed on hand out (attachment).

Fort Leonard Wood site will require soil testing.

Service to Veterans Program: Sharon Keith, Director, Service to Veterans Program

Service to Veterans: Sharon Keith reported program has approximately 40 Service Officers serving in all but 4 counties in the state.

Joe Dailey, Service Officer from Fort Leonard Wood is here today. Service Officers have been very busy keeping up with all the Supermarkets.

Ms. Keith informed the Commissioners the STV program finished FY 2003 with a 35% increase in claims in both compensation and pension benefits.

All Service Officers have the WWII Medals applications. Information on Service Officer locations and work times are on MVC website.

Mr. Taylor noted that Federal FY2002 which ended last October showed an increase from 449 million to 494 million dollars paid out in comp/pension to Missouri's veterans. Current figures are not in yet from VA.

Cemeteries: Jess Rasmussen, Director Higginsville Cemetery

Cemetery Program: Jess Rasmussen reported current statistics for the cemeteries are (attachment):

Springfield – 1, 227 interments and 3,509 pre-certifications
Higginsville – 381 interments and 1,987 pre-certifications
Bloomfield – 874 pre-certifications
Jacksonville – 260 pre-certifications

Funeral Directors are assisting in the marketing of the State Veterans Cemeteries.

Mr. Rasmussen and Mike Robbins, Springfield Cemetery Director attended the State Veterans Cemetery Conference in August. They spent time interfacing with their counterparts. They felt that the conference gave them a clear insight of the NCA's proposed operational measures and standards.

The National Conference of State Veterans Cemetery Directors meeting will be in September. The Commission will be sending cemetery staff to attend.

VSO Grants: Ron Taylor, Executive Director

VSO Program: Mr. Taylor reported the Commission has been receiving applications for this year. The Legislative authorized two years ago \$750,000 for matching grants for veterans organizations and municipal agencies who assist veterans with claims. The matching grants program has enabled us to develop partnerships with the service organizations which helps to increase our outreach. Missouri increased 35% in comp/pension claims by MVC service officers. Through Supermarkets service officers from MVC, VVA, VFW, DAV, AMVETS, Purple Heart and American Legion have participated and their reports indicate an increase from 15 to 25% increase in claims processed.

Mr. Taylor gave a brief history of Missouri's ranking in comp/pension claims. MVC discovered three years ago Missouri ranked 43rd in the nation for the number of dollars paid out per veteran in VA benefits. In the last two years Missouri has now increased to 35th in the nation. We are now shooting for ranking 30th in the nation. Our ranking is effected by the fact that in Missouri only 5.9% of veterans are retirees and some states have 15-20%. In rural counties, veterans are receiving benefits at much higher percentage than those in St. Louis City, St. Louis County and Jackson County. That means 40% of veterans live in these three counties and only receive 26% of the federal benefits

paid and is believed that 60 to 80 million dollars should be coming into the state that's not.

Chairman Niewoehner advised Mr. Taylor to have a report issued for the legislature of the accountability for the 3 quarters of a million dollars. Mr. Taylor indicated that by November we should have all the service organizations reports showing increased numbers in claims and have the federal VA figures on increases in claims and changes in the state of Missouri compared to other states.

Veterans Benefits Awareness Program: Ralph Durnbaugh, Director of Planning and Special Projects:

VBATF: Ralph Durnbaugh reported to the Commission that figures indicate there are at least 31,000 some veterans in the state of Missouri who should be receiving VA benefits. The Lt. Governor formed in 2001 a Veterans Benefits Awareness Task Force which has initiated several actions:

Mr. Durnbaugh distributed to the Commission an updated list of Veterans Benefits Supermarkets scheduled for 2003. Comparison to 2002 and 2003 shows increase of \$45 million going out to Missouri Veterans. Since July 2002, twelve Supermarkets have been conducted around the state and the Commission has served over 2,500 veterans, spouses and families of veterans. Four additional Supermarkets are planned for this year:

September 24 – Kansas City (joint with Workforce Development)
October 18 – Booneville
October – Arnold
November – St. Joseph

The toll free 800 number has received a total of over 4,500 calls to date since July 2002. Mr. Durnbaugh distributed a chart of the 800 number statistics.

Mr. Durnbaugh introduced to the Commission State Chairman of Supermarkets John Eckhoff and Kathy Sturgeon. Mr. Eckhoff noted that the July 22 Supermarket in Florissant joined by 30 volunteers, 68 agencies and brought in over 500 veteran attendees. MS. Sturgeon developed a feedback form and handed to veterans at the Supermarket. A statistical report was distributed to the Commissioners identifying key information from these feedback forms.

III. NEW BUSINESS:

Future Budget Strategy: Ron Taylor explained that he and the Chairman of the Commission have been working on a long range plan for handling future budget request in order to protect or to prolong the liability of the VCCITF. They have done some serious budget crunching over the last couple of months and they think in order not to have more out of VCCITF then money going into it will require some shiftback or increase in general revenue. He stated the last figures would

require approximately 18-20% of our budget to be from GR to go along with both resident rates income, federal per diem and the money from the VCCITF to be able to operate all 1,350 beds and the cemeteries without running into a deficit situation. A meeting was held with Budget and Planning and MVC presented that scenario to them stating that if there is not that increase in GR, where we think we can go in terms of resident rate increases and enhance our other income, they stated they would get back to us as of yet we have not heard anything back. He feels it would be wise to look at a budget plan for five to six years that also envisions keeping a minimum balance in the VCCITF bringing emergency repairs somewhere between 3 to 5 million.

Mr. Taylor distributed a copy of FY 2005 Decision Items. Chairman Neiwoehner explained during the past session we were asked by the budget office what would happen if we were cut 4 million dollars from our budget. Chairman Neiwoehner stated that only place where we can cut money is from our Homes. This would affect us also by losing 8 million from VA per diem payments for our residents plus 6 million dollars that the residents pay themselves which would total a hit of 18 million dollars, which would cut our program by 37%. Mr. Taylor pointed out several key decision items from the report and discussed.

Commissioner Gralike explained that GR is a pull of tax money and that several agencies received cuts this past session from GR.

A draft Contraction plan was distributed. If we get to the point of cutting from our Homes budget we have a proposed contraction plan (attachment).

Resident Rate Increase proposal for January 1, 2004 (attachment). Mr. Taylor recommended a 10% increase for resident charge bringing maximum rate to \$1,587. But also will increase personal exemption for single veterans to \$90 from current \$50. Commissioner Ross made a motion to accept rate increase as proposed. Commissioner Gralike seconded the motion. By a voice vote the motion passed unanimously. Mr. Taylor explained this will generate 1 to 1.2 million dollars per year and still leave Missouri below other states.

IV. OTHER BUSINESS:

Mr. Taylor informed the Commissioner invitations will be mailed out soon for the Dedication Ceremonies going on throughout the State. Commissioners will be notified of the first burials in the two new cemeteries.

He also reported that the Secretary of States office is in the process of updating the Rules and Regulations for the State of Missouri. MVC is working on updating our pages and incorporating operating procedures and rates increases.

Commissioner Ross addresses his concerns pertaining to a private cemetery in Jackson County. Information is being sent out in the mail and fraudulent advertising is being done concerning free veterans and spouses burials. MVC forwarded information to the Attorney Generals Office regarding this and we

have not been notified if the Attorney General's office is pursuing the issue. Commissioner Ross made a motion to request the Commission to adopt a Resolution and send to the Chief Law Enforcer at the AG's office to investigate this organization. Commissioner Fairfax seconded the motion. By a voice vote the motion passed unanimously. Representative Ransdall requested a copy of the resolution be forwarded to his office.

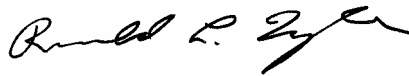
Commissioner Fairfax thanked Representative Ransdall for his support of veterans. He also thanked Hal Dulle for his hard work during the past legislative session.

Commissioner Gralike thanked the people of the community for their great interest in veterans issues.

NEXT MEETING

Chairman Niewoehner announced the next Commission meeting will be on Monday, November 17, 2003 at 10:00 a.m. at MVC Headquarters.

With no further business to come before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned.



Ronald L. Taylor, Secretary